

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

November 12, 2004

The Week Ahead

Tue., Nov. 16

Commissioner Miller will make a presentation to a Tennessee State University social work policy class.

Wed., Nov. 17

Commissioner Miller will engage in budget hearings with Gov. Bredesen.

Fri., Nov. 19

Commissioner Miller will attend the 30th anniversary of the Annual Legislative Retreat and Training Conference in Chattanooga.

DCS Retirements

DCS is bidding farewell to two employees. **Jean Snider** retired on October 11. And **Harry Lane** will be retiring on November 16. Let's congratulate them and extend them our best wishes in their future pursuits.

If you are retiring or know a DCS employee who has recently retired or will be retiring in the near future, please send such announcements to public information officer K. Danielle Edwards at K.Danielle.Edwards@state.tn.us.

Changes in TennCare

Submitted by Mary Beth Franklin, TennCare Liaison, Blue Ribbon Committee

On Wednesday, the Governor announced that actions were in motion to begin dissolving the TennCare waiver program that serves both Medicaid eligible individuals and the uninsured/uninsurable population. In dissolving TennCare, the state would revert to operating a regular Medicaid program.

Like others, your first question might be, *"If the Governor's plan to dissolve TennCare moves forward, what does this mean for children in the care of DCS? How will they obtain health care?"*

The vast majority of children in care are Medicaid eligible. Therefore, they will have health care coverage through the Medicaid program.

There are a small number of children in care who are not Medicaid eligible, but currently receive TennCare as an uninsured on TennCare Standard. DCS will work with the Bureau administering Medicaid to address policy issues for this small population to maximize Medicaid eligibility options for them.

DCS is responsible for accessing medical and behavioral health services for children in care. If Medicaid is not the mechanism for obtaining these services, DCS will continue to be responsible for ensuring their health care.

Your second question is probably, *“How soon with these changes take place?”*

The governor is still hoping that advocates will work with the state to enable TennCare to continue. During the next week, the state will be in final discussions with the organization that has sued the state to determine whether an agreement can be reached that will allow the state to keep the TennCare program.

Even if we return to a traditional Medicaid program, there will be no immediate impact on enrollees. Enrollees will receive notices from the Bureau several weeks prior to any change being made. The notices to enrollees will detail exactly how their benefits will change.

Another common question is, *“Will the legal consent decree relating to EPSDT services (John B.) and the legal consent decree regarding appeals (Grier) no longer be effective if TennCare is dissolved?”*

No. Those consent decrees apply to the Medicaid program. They are based primarily on interpretations related to the Medicaid regulations.

As plans are implemented, DCS will work closely with the Bureau administering TennCare and Medicaid to ensure that transitions to new health plans for children in care are smooth and provide minimal disruption to service delivery.

The Perspective of a DCS Neophyte

Submitted by K. Danielle Edwards, Public Information Officer

One of the definitions the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* provides for the word neophyte is one who is “newly planted.” As I wrap up my first month as a new employee with DCS, I find this definition fitting.

When I reported to the Cordell Hull Building for my first day of work on October 12, I felt like a seedling that had been methodically tossed within a gated field of fertile soil - a field wherein the realm of possibility and its quiet glories were overshadowed by the presence of a few stubborn weeds that kept creeping up alongside the fence. Even as a newcomer, I knew that this agency had been faced with a series of challenges that seemed to always find their way into the media limelight. It was as if the everyday successes and joys within the department were like a bed of clovers that the average onlooker fails to appreciate because they lack the climactic fire of the neighboring flowers in bloom, which are, of course, metaphors for happenings that spawn negative coverage of the agency.

As I began to dissect the bevy of DCS acronyms and institutional lingo, learn to put faces with names and get a feel for all the various chains of command to get things accomplished

(still working on that one!), I began transforming from an unsettled seedling to one that began to nestle in the earth and find some bearings. I also began to understand more fully and develop a more firmly fixed appreciation for the tireless work and advocacy in which many DCS employees engage everyday. I witness the passion behind implementing “best practices” for families and children in the state. I see the disbelief and pain on faces when children are victimized by a series of unconscionable events. I hear the sincerity in people’s voices when they say what they mean. I see the energized faces who report here in the mornings, and I feel they must not wholly perceive their work for DCS as a job in the staid J.O.B. sense, but instead as a calling, a ministry, a philanthropic and altruistic duty.

I feel like a seed that is in the process of settling and starting to form some rudimentary roots. I come from the world of chic print journalism - the uncanny coldness of the newsroom through which I actively chased down of entertainers and performers who probably have too much influence on too many young lives today.

I came here because I wanted to do work where I felt like I was helping someone – work with more substance and meaning. I sought work that was congruent with my personal belief system. It was no longer enough for me to write stories and news articles, but instead I felt a need to act with a sense of agency for the silent, the speechless, the misdirected and/or under-guided.

And here at DCS, I feel like I am performing that work. Work that matters. Affecting real people’s lives. One hour, one day and one week at a time. Root by root. And bloom by bloom.

Upper Cumberland Region celebrates DCS “all day”

Submitted by Vanessa I. Jones

The Upper Cumberland Region held the 2004 “DCS All Day” on October 12 at Cordell Hull Lake’s Camp Discovery in Gainesboro, Tenn. DCS All Day was established in 1998 as a time set aside for the Upper Cumberland Region’s DCS and CSA employees to enjoy good food and games, while making new friendships and visiting with old friends.

This year’s event featured a barbecue lunch and friendly competition in bingo, volleyball, fishing tournaments, scavenger hunts and football. Staff members won door prizes every 30 minutes throughout the day. Luncheon speakers included regional administrator Sandra Jordan and CSA executive director Sue Pilson, along with special guest speaker Daryl Chansuthus, director of Continuous Quality Improvement.

All CPS employees and those involved in the recent CPS clean-up received invitations to an Oct. 27 pizza party that was held in their honor. Invitations acknowledging the hardworking CPS staff were given out by Sandra Jordan and Central Office guest Beth Kasch.

With the success of this year’s DCS All Day, staff members are marking their calendars for next year’s event.

CORE Leadership

CORE Leadership Meeting Beth Kasch, Presiding November 2, 2004

OIS Status

Michael Price stated the complaint tracking system for the Ombudsman's Office has been released. Parties who answer complaint calls can access the system, which will also enable the routing of complaints.

OIS hopes to have rate changes for adoption/foster care by the end of the year.

05/05 Release Requirement Meeting

Michael Price stressed the need for participation from the Core Leadership team. The team has developed an alternative schedule that includes conference calls to get back on schedule. Input from Programs would help define agency needs in developing an effective tool. Different regions having different processes was also highlighted; it was noted that this cannot continue in the name of uniformity and consensus from the field, in particular, for the agency, at large.

Field Day

The Commissioner said that executive directors and members of their staff who have not spent a day in the field would now be required to do so within the next two months. The expectation is to shadow at least one field staff person, such as HCCM's, CPS or juvenile justice staff, in addition to attending a CFTM.

The Commissioner will be spending more time in the legislature.

Case Reviews

CLT members will review four cases per month. Peggy Lee will develop a sign in/out sheet. Frank Mix will also have case files for reviews.

Improving Casework

The Commissioner said that the agency is missing the clinical component in our casework that reflects essential understanding of human beings, like how people change and grow. She emphasized that our case managers need to practice empathy and listening skills when working with our children and families.

Leadership Issue

CLT addressed short-term decision making vs. long-term decision making in problem solving. The general conclusion was that when people rely upon short-term decision-making, unintended consequences often result.

Regional Implementation Plans

The Commissioner has been having meetings with the regions to review implementation plans. These plans address CFTM, "One Worker, One Child," diligent recruitment and CPS backlogs. She has learned that many people in the field are not getting information about

important changes and that communication must improve. The Weekly Wrap Up should be a key vehicle in general information dissemination, as well as communicating instrumental changes.

Contract Issues

The SIR and contract group will be established to develop a protocol with the mission that “Everything that is driving DCS should be driving our contract agencies.”

SIU and Psychotropic Medication Dress Rehearsal

The TAC was here on November 8-9 and met with executive directors to discuss progress on the Path to Excellence Implementation Plan. Carla Aaron, Debra Valentine (SIU) and Tricia Henwood (psychotropic medication) performed a “dress rehearsal” in preparation for the actual meeting with the CLT.

Next Week

Core Leadership Team members need to be prepared to discuss Path to Excellence, Grier and John B. Bonnie will review Path to Excellence and Mary Beth will review John B. and Grier. Petrina will review PIP on 11/16/04. CLT will look at the big picture around the Practice Model.



DCS employee Amy Whitt submitted the following quotation – a friendly reminder to her colleagues and all who work within the department not to forget about themselves in their commitment to children and families.

Before you can even think about helping others, you need to help yourself and begin by believing in yourself. To believe in yourself, you must take care of yourself. No matter how hard you try to take care of another and you are not taking care of yourself, you will fail.

At some point each day, take some time for the most important person in your life,

YOU!

-Jim Holler, Jr., Chief of Police, Liberty Township Police, Adams County, Penn.